

Resurrection of a museum

By Ariella Budick

Published: September 29 2008 03:00 | Last updated: September 29 2008 03:00

Buildings in New York bloom between breakfast and lunch. Skyscrapers rise where warehouses huddled, whole neighbourhoods re-cloak themselves in spark-ling glass and panoramic penthouse views pass away.

So preservationists were well practised in outrage by the time they heard that 2 Columbus Circle, an endearingly ugly monument to 1960s quasi-modernism, was to be given a radical facelift.

One critic pronounced the plan a "rape". Novelist Tom Wolfe reacted to the prospect of more windows with invective. When the renovation is completed, he sputtered, "we will see the Platonic ideal of plain transparency, confusing transparency, peekaboo voyeurism, I-see-you voyeurism and hide-and-seeK deception of the dominant regime".

The object of all this protective hysteria was a rare local example of Edward Durrell Stone's eccentric late style, a melding of modern, Gothic and Romanesque, with a shadowy arcade and top-floor Venetian loggia.

Built in 1964 as a museum to house the modern art collection of supermarket magnate Huntington Hartford, the building attracted revulsion. Ada Louise Huxtable, for instance, mocked it as a "die-cut Venetian palazzo on lollipops". The museum lasted five years and the awkward edifice housed various other institutions before its abandonment in 1998.

Now it is back. Brad Cloepfil of Allied Works Architecture has replaced Stone's mottled marble with glinting ceramic tiles and inserted panes of fritted glass into the façade, welcoming northern light into a once cave-like interior.

This understated, graceful renovation offers a subtle rejoinder to the blunt rhetoric that preceded it. The erstwhile "lollipop building" has been resurrected as the Museum of Art and Design, an institution that has lately experienced its own rebirth.

Once known as the American Crafts Museum, it now exhibits everything threedimensional from jewellery to furniture to avant-garde installation art. Creative reuse is the theme of both the building and the museum's inaugural show, *Second Lives, Remixing the Ordinary*, an agglomeration of everyday stuff alchemised into extraordinary objects. Architect and artists alike have found ways to manipulate their finds into singular creations.

Before Cloepfil got his hands on 2 Columbus Circle, only small snatches of daylight lit the weirdly proportioned space. The old exhibition area spiralled round a central elevator core, with cramped, strangely shaped galleries set at half-story intervals. He has removed the maze of mezzanines and banished the darkness. The new, full-height galleries are brightened by strategic slashes in the building's skin, vivid spots that make gorgeous settings for some of the museum's larger-than-life installations.

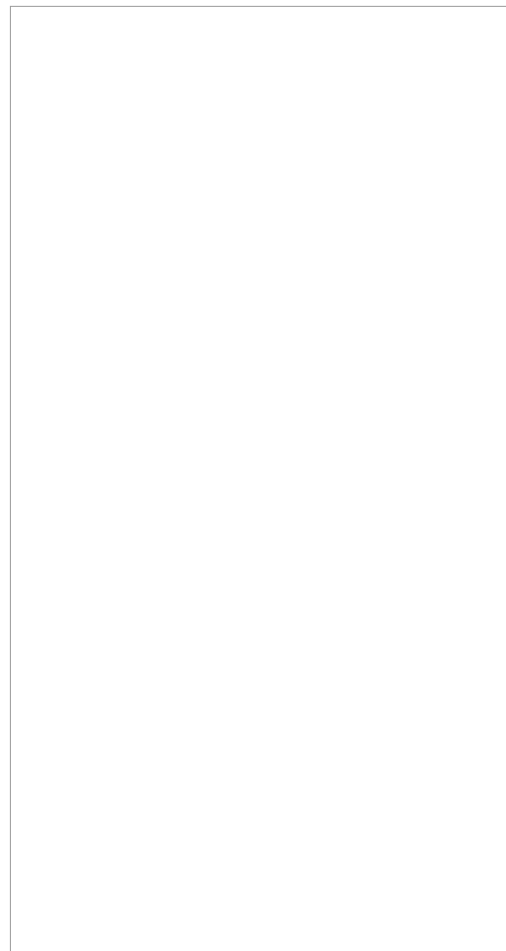
There will no doubt be those left disconsolate by the loss of a patch of New York kookiness, but I am not among them. Stone's oddity has been elegantly re-clad in a sleek hide that glimmers iridescently in the sun. Ribbons of glass snake their way up all four facades, accentuating the way the delicately concave building stands like a miniature castle on a traffic island. The lollipop columns remain, visible in the lobby and ghostly on the street, shrouded behind frosted glass.

The museum has also built a new identity on the framework of its past. As the American Craft Museum, it mostly limited itself to objects classified according to such materials as clay, fibre, glass, metal, wood. As the MoAD, it includes almost everything 3D that involves dedicated, technically flawless and terrifyingly vigorous labour. The museum now sneers at once-impregnable boundaries between fine art, craft, decoration and design, filtering all of those things through the exquisite eye of its chief curator, David McFadden.

Everything here absorbed hours of dogged toil. For *Spoons*, Jill Townsley assembled an enormous pyramid out of 3,091 red rubber bands and 9,273 - you guessed it - spoons. The piece's minimalist appearance is belied by the maximalist work ethic, all in the service of something that will quickly disappear. As the artist says in a wall text, the elasticity of the rubber bands will gradually give way, and the whole structure will decompose into a heaping memorial to futility and transience.

Business for sale

Contracts & tenders



A large tapestry by Terese Agnew subscribes to a more traditional aesthetic, but shares in the collective compulsiveness. Over two years, Agnew stitched 30,000 clothing labels together to form a wall-sized portrait of a Bangladeshi seamstress, one of the invisible millions. To counter the exploitation of sweatshops, Agnew placed herself in the position of the worker parked day after day before her sewing machine.

The artists here have an assortment of axes to grind - globalisation, big pharma, feminine identity among them - but the most poetic piece, Paul Villinski's *My Back Pages* deals with the same topic as Cloepfil: how to honour the past even as you let it go. Villinski tenderly shredded his record collection, listening to each album before subjecting it to the scroll saw and shaping it into a butterfly. The flock of vinyl memories takes flight from a turntable placed on a stack of intact records and flutters towards one of the freshly cut windows. The butterflies do not escape, of course. The grooved creatures are Villinski's version of the lollipop columns: fragments of everything that remains with us even after we have moved on.

Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary, Museum of Arts and Design . To February 15 Tel. 212-299-7777

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2008

[Print article](#) [Email article](#) [Order reprints](#)

[Delicious](#) [reddit](#) [Digg](#) [Facebook](#) [stumbleupon](#) [Yahoo! Buzz](#)

Jobs

SEARCH

[Deputy Director of Finance](#)
[London Ambulance Service NHS Trust](#)

[Secretary General](#)
[The European Court of Auditors](#)

[Executive Search and Recruitment Consultants within Sport](#)

[Sports Recruitment International](#)

[Lead Accountant](#)
[Metropolitan Police Service](#)

RECRUITERS

FT.com can deliver talented individuals across all industries around the world

[Post a job now](#)

RELATED SERVICES

FT Bespoke Forums	FT Newspaper subscriptions
UK annual reports	FT Fine Wine Plan
Market research	FT Diaries
Growth companies	FT Bookshop
Corporate subscriptions	FT Conferences
Luxury Travel brochures	FT Syndication services
Analyst Research	The Non-Executive Director
MBA-Direct.com	

[FT Home](#)

[Site map](#) [Contact us](#) [Help](#)

[Advertise with the FT](#) [Media centre](#) [FT Newspaper subscriptions](#) [FT Conferences](#) [FT Syndication](#) [Corporate subscriptions](#) [FT Group](#) [Careers at the FT](#)

Partner sites: [Chinese FT.com](#) [The Mergermarket Group](#) [Investors Chronicle](#) [Exec-Appointments.com](#) [Money Media](#) [The Banker](#) [fDi Intelligence](#) [MBA-Direct.com](#) [The Non-Executive Director](#)

© Copyright The Financial Times Ltd 2008. "FT" and "Financial Times" are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd. [Privacy policy](#) [Terms](#)